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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/24): REPORTS ON ABBAS' REGIONAL MEETINGS

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Main Stories:  
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All papers lead with statements made by Palestinian Authority President Abbas during a press conference following his meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak in Cairo yesterday. Abbas is quoted as blaming both Israel and Hamas for the Gaza siege, while noting that Egypt is qualified to mediate to solve the Palestinian problems in Gaza and is doing its best to help the Palestinians. Abbas reiterated his rejection of any potential Israeli offensive against Gaza as well as his rejection of Hamas' "futile" rocket attacks on Israel. Abbas also denied that there are any political prisoners in Palestinian Authority prisons. Al Quds and Al Ayyam report on Abbas' meeting yesterday with Jordanian Foreign Minister Al Basheer in Ramallah. Abbas stated during the press conference following the meeting that the two had discussed his recent visit to Washington and his meeting with President Bush.

All the papers run statements by Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Fayyad yesterday calling for reuniting the Palestinian homeland. Al-Ayyam runs an undated Al Sharq Al Awsat newspaper interview with Fayyad from his stay in London for an economic conference. Fayyad says that chaos in the Palestinian Territories resulted in the emigration of around 50,000 Palestinians in 2006-2007. He also added that the Palestinian Authority money transfers to Gaza have so far prevented the collapse of the Gaza Strip. Finally, he denied that there is any Fatah opposition to his government.

All the papers report on the end of the 24-hour truce in Gaza, with the news that Palestinian factions resumed firing projectiles at Israel and the Israeli military killed three Palestinian militants who were attempting to plant a bomb near the Israeli border fence. The papers report that Hamas is demanding Israel commit to its "obligations" from the original six month truce in order for it to

be renewed. The papers also report that Israel partially opened three Gaza crossings to allow for the entry of humanitarian assistance loaded onto 40 trucks, 20 of which were for UNRWA and the rest for the private sector.

Al Ayyam quotes the French Consul General Alain Remy, from his interview yesterday with Palestinian media, saying that there are no contacts between France and Hamas. Remy remarked that donor countries have provided three billion USD in assistance to the Palestinians since the Paris conference. Remy also said that there is no French peace plan per se, but that there is an EU working paper which was crafted in order to keep the peace process alive, as the Annapolis process has not succeeded in achieving its desired objective of reaching a signed agreement by the end of 2008. Remy added that the working paper was still an internal EU one and has not yet been sent officially to either of the parties. Remy hoped that the next US administration would continue the momentum of Annapolis and consider the Middle East peace process a priority from the moment it assumes office in late January. He further added that, "We think we can provide the Palestinian Authority with financial assistance of Euro 25 million in early 2009, as we did last year". Finally, he revealed that the EU would be ready to participate in a military force deployed in the Palestinian Territories following a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

Al Quds front page runs the results of a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research showing that most Palestinians want legislative and presidential elections in early 2009 to end the Fatah-Hamas conflict, and most also want to see a stronger intervention from the Obama administration for resolving the conflict with Israel. The results show that Hamas' popularity is no longer on the wane, while Fatah's popularity remains stable,

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despite the Hamas boycott of the national dialogue. The poll shows that a majority of Palestinians blame both Hamas and Fatah equally for the failure of the national dialogue and that a majority of Palestinians support Hamas' stand on the end of PA President Abbas' term in January 2009.

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¶1. Al Quds editorial "The complicated crisis in Gaza" opines: "The worst scenario that could happen [in Gaza], is the use of military force, especially the Israeli one, in an attempt to topple the Hamas movement, because such an attempt is a definite prescription for bloodshed, extreme loss of life, and great destruction to infrastructure ... Considering this option [military force] is a form of recklessness and miscalculation given the catastrophic implications such a massive offensive would wreak in Gaza, which could have in turn have regional and international repercussions. The solution to the crisis is in the hands of Hamas, which should reconsider its calculations and take into consideration the suffering of the citizens of Gaza. Through dialogue and understanding, Hamas should come closer to the Palestinian Authority and end the prevailing divisiveness in the interests of the Palestinian people and their cause".

¶2. Jawad Al Basheeti writes in Al Ayyam under the title "War is an extension of elections": "The Gaza Strip has already become the largest "polling booth" for Israel, where Netanyahu, Livni and Barak compete to marshal the winds to propel their electoral boats...It is extremely bad for the Palestinians, and Gazans in particular, to constantly extend the truce [with Israel] in exchange for Israel constantly extending the siege of the Gaza Strip...The Palestinian controversy over the "two old options" - the "negotiated solution" and the "solution through military resistance" - has in fact produced a miserable third option, which is the "truce" option. Both in theory and in practice, Palestinian policy has lost its way."

Walles